

Introduction:¹

I was not raised in a biblically Christian atmosphere. Nor had I been exposed to the Bible. When the Lord drew me to himself in my twenties, one of my itching questions pertained to the integrity of the Bible. I’ve found this is a question on the minds of many, hence today’s post. But the more we investigate the Bible, the more we find that the Bible is like no other book.

A few weeks ago we began a series looking at some of the most critical and fundamental questions surrounding the Bible. What is the Bible? Where did we get it? Who decided what would, and would not be, in the Bible? How can it be said that the 66 books alone are the inerrant, infallible words of God?

These questions concern the topic of bibliology. We are attempting to address these over the course of the next several weeks. In our first post, we studied the topic of revelation, answering the question, “What is the Bible?”

Then, we answered, “How did God give special revelation?” “Where did the Bible come from?”

The logical place to go next pertains to the accuracy of the Bible. How accurate is the inspired revelation of the 66 books in the Bible? How do we know?

Since Scripture is God’s revelation given through inspiration, it is inerrant. Simply put, the inerrancy of the Bible means that the 66 books of Scripture are truth, containing no error. In the original manuscripts, every word is entirely without error. Whatever Scripture affirms is true and not contrary to fact. Whether speaking of the six-day creation, a global flood, the grace and mercy of God, the resurrection and the future bodily return of Jesus Christ, the Bible is true, factual, and without error. In other words, the Bible is absolutely inerrant.

The question of inerrancy – how true is the Bible – depends upon the source and nature of the Bible. To understand the extent of the Bible’s truthfulness begins with asking, “What is the Bible?” and, “How did we get it?”

First, the Bible is special revelation. That is to say, the very words are disclosure from God otherwise unavailable to, or undiscoverable by, man. The Bible is the Creator’s objective revelation to us.

¹ Eric Davis, “How True is the Bible? – Inerrancy,” *The CrippleGate*, March 21, 2018, <https://thecripplegate.com/how-true-is-the-bible-inerrancy/>.

Second, the Bible was given by God through the act of inspiration. The Holy Spirit superintended the human writers of the 66 books of the Bible such that what they wrote were God's words to humanity in the original writings. This means that to read the words of the Bible is to read the words of God. To study the Bible is to study the words of God.

But, what does this tell us about the extent of truthfulness in the Bible? We've observed something crucial about the nature and source of the Bible: its source is God. Its nature is disclosure from God. So, that demands the question, "Who is God that we should believe him?" The truthfulness of the Bible is a function of the truthfulness of the God who gave it. The words of the Bible can only be believed insofar as the God who gave the Bible can be believed.

How True is God?

To ask, "How true is the Bible?" is to ask, "How true is God?" The issue of inerrancy is an issue of the integrity of God.

Secular or extrabiblical sources have never succeeded in demonstrating that God's word contains a single error. God does not need witnesses below or outside of himself to authenticate him. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that no one has proven that the Bible contains error. This is a remarkable testimony to the character of the Bible, and, therefore, the character of God.

More importantly, the Bible testifies to the utter trustworthiness of God. God is a being who cannot lie (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Rom. 3:4; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). To lie would go against the character of God; something which he will not and cannot do. He is perfectly upright in his character, and therefore, his deeds. "His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He" (Deut. 32:4). Words are always a measure of a person's character and nature. God, being upright, faithful, and true, therefore, will only speak words that are upright, faithful, and true.

Furthermore, history demonstrates that God is batting one thousand when it comes to "promise given" and "promise kept." Some of the more notable examples involve the seeming unlikely worldwide flood (Gen. 6:13 and Gen. 7:11), a numerous nation created from an elderly, barren couple (Gen. 15:5 and Exod. 12:37), the Messiah born of a virgin in Bethlehem from the line of David who atoned for the sin of his people in substitutionary penal death (Isa. 7:14, 9:6-7, 53:4-6; Micah 5:2; and Luke 1:34-35; 2:4, 3:31; 1 Pet. 2:24), and the bodily resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 20:19 and Matt. 28:6). From our vantage, those are not the easiest promises to keep. But God is God. Tomes could be written, cataloguing the myriad of promises given and kept by God over the

millennia. The aforementioned showcase the utter truthfulness and integrity of God and his word. All of this buttresses the fact of the inerrancy of the 66 books of the Bible.

How true is God? He is truth (John 14:6). He is the measure and standard of truth. A true Bible is simply the logical consequence of a true God.

As observed in our study of revelation and inspiration, Scripture is the very words of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17, 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The character of Scripture, therefore, will mirror the character of God. For this reason, Scripture affirms that it is entirely without error (Ps. 12:6, 119:89). Jesus affirmed it in the positive, attributing utter truthfulness to the word of God (John 17:17). All this means that the Bible is inerrant.

What About Our Bible Translations?

God's act of inspiration only extended to the original manuscripts of the Scripture. No document which copied or translated the Scripture was inspired. Since that is the case, how error-free can we say that our current translations are? Is my English Bible as inerrant as the original manuscripts?

Translations are inerrant insofar as they reproduce the original manuscripts. Theologians refer to this as "derived inspiration." In the providence of God he decided to not extend the act of inspiration to copies and translations. Even so, we can say that our English Bible is inerrant. Also in the providence of God, we currently know the content of over 99% of the original biblical manuscripts. How is this discerned? We possess thousands of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic manuscripts of the biblical text. For the New Testament, there are currently over 5000 Greek manuscripts in possession which range from a fragment of a verse to all 27 books. A systematic comparison of manuscripts on an identical text or book of the Bible tells us what was and was not original. Scholars and archaeologists over the past few centuries – critics and believers – have made painstaking efforts to compare these manuscripts. Evidence shows a striking agreement between the manuscripts; over 99%. Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort concluded that manuscript discrepancies counted for less than one, one-thousandth of the entire text. To this day, scholars agree that the discrepancies are minor (e.g. spelling differences) and do not call into question any major Christian doctrine. Further, we possess manuscripts which date to within a few decades of the events themselves. Compare that, for example, to the *Annals*, written by Roman historian, Tacitus, at the turn of the second century. In this case, we possess only one manuscript, dated in the ninth century, some 800 years after the events, and yet many rely upon this for ancient Roman history. The textual integrity of the Bible greatly surpasses many ancient secular texts.

We know what the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts said. And there is no dispute as to whether we understand these languages. Therefore, to the extent that our

translated copies represent the original manuscripts, we can say that we hold an inerrant copy of the Scripture in our hand.

What Was Jesus' View of Inerrancy?

Jesus held to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. We see this in many ways. First, he believed that the Scripture was the voice of God (Matt. 22:31). He firmly believed that God the Father is a God of complete truth (John 8:38-47, 10:37-38, 17:17). It follows that Jesus believed that Scripture, the word of God, is inerrant.

Second, Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit was given to insure the message of Scripture:

I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you (John 14:16-17).

We can infer that Jesus did not affirm that the God-sent Holy Spirit would err or lie. Jesus believed that the Spirit would inspire the Gospels and the content which comprises the book of Acts (John 14:25-26, 15:26-27). Similarly, he understood that the Spirit would inspire the Epistles, which he revealed to the apostles in the upper room (John 16:12-15).

Also, Jesus' understanding of inerrancy is apparent in the way he argued from Scripture. For example, he affirmed the doctrine of the resurrection based upon the tense of a verb (Matt. 22:31-32, "I am the God of Abraham..."). How does this demonstrate that Jesus held to inerrancy? A major belief (resurrection) is true because the verb tense of "to be" in that verse. Even the minute details are inerrant.

Finally, Jesus affirmed that the book of Revelation is his final word until he returns:

[W]ho testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw...¹⁹ Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things (Rev. 1:2, 19).

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book (Rev. 22:18-19).

He understood his own words to also be inerrant (cf. John 8:29).

Some Objections to Inerrancy

Objection #1: Only the message of Scripture is inerrant.

In other words, it is not every word that is inerrant, but simply the general idea and themes of Scripture. However, this contradicts Jesus' approach to the Bible as demonstrated above. And, a generalist view of inerrancy is incompatible with Scripture's view of itself: "Every word of God is tested" (Prov. 30:5), and, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16).

Objection #2: Scripture must follow the rules of grammar to be inerrant.

Some reject inerrancy on the grounds that there are grammatical errors. However, the Bible does not claim to be grammatically flawless. This should be expected in a book which flawlessly captures the flaw and folly of the human race. Perhaps at times the grammatical errors are a commentary in themselves. What Scripture does claim is unadulterated truth.

Objection #3: Inerrancy of the Bible cannot be true due to the many figures of speech.

Individuals take issue with inerrancy on the grounds that Scripture speaks of God having human features while also teaching that he is spirit (e.g. eyes, 2 Chron. 16:9; hands, Isa. 66:2; arms, Isa. 59:1). I would venture to say that in no other written document do we take this approach. Figures of speech do not negate truth. Rather, they express a certain truth using literary devices in a specific context for a specific reason. The above examples include anthropomorphisms, sayings which communicate the real action of God yet in human form. Figurative language does not require falsehood.

Objection #4: Scripture contains some numerical and scientific inaccuracies.

For example, the claim is made that Jesus was wrong when he said that the mustard seed is the smallest of seeds (Matt. 13:31-32). The orchid seed is smaller, demonstrating Jesus' error. Therefore, inerrancy is general at best or untrue at worst. However, we must examine context. The context of Matthew 13 was not a comprehensive global botany and plant physiology class. Instead, he was communicating a truth using terms which were familiar to a first century Palestinian agrarian society. His audience knew immediately what a mustard seed was. More importantly, they understood the vivid truth illustrated: the kingdom of God begins quite small, but grows huge, just like a mustard seed does when it becomes a full-grown plant.

Inerrancy requires that the reader think clearly about the context and setting of a text. Others reject inerrancy on the basis of supposed numerical inaccuracies. For example, some consider it inflated and imprecise to claim that the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35, Isa. 37:36).

The claim of inflated reporting is groundless and superficial. Many wars throughout the centuries, without explicit divine intervention, experienced casualties surpassing 185,000. Also, Assyria was an enormous empire during the 7th century B.C, ruling the bulk of the fertile crescent, and east to the Persian Gulf. An army of this size would be likely. Also, secular sources also report something of this particular slaughter. Finally, the issue comes down to trusting in ourselves or God.

The rejection of inerrancy on the grounds of imprecision is also unacceptable. Such a thing is not practiced in larger society. For example, a journalist might report that 15,000 people were killed, when the number may have been 14,798 or 15,231. Truth is not considered compromised in such cases because there is a numerical context which permits for minor approximation.

Inerrancy is not invalidated in contexts of permissible estimation.

Objection #5: The Bible is full of contradictions.

Where?

Implications of Inerrancy

Several implications exist in light of Scripture's absolute inerrancy.

We can trust the Scripture entirely because we can trust God entirely. No objective doubt can be brought upon the Bible due to its inerrant character.

Since Scripture is without error, no passage needs updating or adjusting. God is infinitely wise, good, and perfect. He spoke nothing in his word that requires fine-tuning. Fallen man is in no place to adjudicate holy God.

We must obey Scripture's commands and live in light of its claims. To do otherwise is to attribute falsehood to God.

Conclusion

The God of the Bible is a God of unwavering truth. He is upright and trustworthy in nature and deed. At no time in history has God affirmed something contrary to fact or failed to follow through with his promises. The remaining history will prove likewise. Motivated by his own glory and love for sinners, this God gave special revelation through the act of inspiration, with the result being the 66 books of Scripture. Thus, inspiration establishes the fact of the inerrancy of all 66 books. The Bible is truth. Additionally, we can go further and say that the Bible is infallible. It is inerrant in being free from falsehood, and it is infallible in that it cannot mislead. The Bible is both inerrant and infallible.

To reject the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible has serious implications. It is to attribute falsehood to God. As observed, God's word claims to be true in entirety; in every detail. Scripture does not claim to be generally true or 80-90% true, but inerrantly true. Thus, we cannot on the one hand affirm, "God is true" and "Scripture is sort of inerrant." Those are logical contradictions. To reject inerrancy is to attribute falsehood to God the Father, for he claims to be a God who cannot lie. To reject inerrancy is to attribute falsehood to God the Son, for he claims the truthfulness of Scripture. To reject inerrancy is to attribute falsehood to God the Spirit, for Jesus claimed he would speak truth through human instruments. There is no way around it: to reject biblical inerrancy is to call the triune God of the Bible a liar. To confess biblical inerrancy is to confess the truthfulness of the God of the Bible.